

For immediate release

Age UK Oxfordshire's exercise classes innovate and run classes on Zoom

Pre-COVID, Generation Games, Age UK Oxfordshire's physical activity service, were delivering 64 classes in the community across Oxfordshire, with around 1,000 older people attending sessions every week.

With the event of COVID-19 everything changed and physical classes had to be suspended.

The Generation Games service had to go online, and began to deliver exercise sessions by Zoom, the online video platform, instead.

Regaining and maintaining fitness, strength and balance has been, and is, crucial during this time. Deconditioning is a serious consequence of inactivity. It was clear early on that many people (of all ages) were not getting their recommended 'daily dose' of exercise. For older people in particular, this can have detrimental effects: not being able live life as independently as they would like. Everyday tasks such as walking up stairs, walking in general, or holding a full kettle of water become more difficult. These are all very real consequences of deconditioning.

Maggie, who joined a Zoom exercise class commented: "I'm a lot weaker now than before. I've been lying on the sofa during the pandemic and I've lost a lot of strength. You've saved me."

The first class we converted from a face to face to a Zoom class was a Strength & Balance session that was previously held in Jericho community centre. We wrote comprehensive instructions on how to get online with Zoom and were on hand to help solve issues where possible. There are now on average 12 people who attend this class every week. "I feel every week there is back up there from Age UK [Oxfordshire]. If I don't manage something, someone will notice and help me to get back again. That's a big security for me," said one participant.

The class has been running on Zoom for some weeks now. One regular participant said: "I found it initially very challenging. I've persevered and I've noticed that I'm improving, which I think is a marvellous tribute to you [the teacher] and those that have put this together for us – so thank you".

While lockdown was new, strange and in many ways frightening for many people, Gill commented: "It may seem an odd thing to say but for me this has been a bit of normality during lockdown. We know you [the teacher] - you know us. I've enjoyed it very much."

Zoom was unfamiliar to many of our participants. One participant, Anthea said: "Initially it was difficult, I find technology rather beyond me, but with a little help it's very comfortable and quick. I don't know what I'd do without my exercise class."

While many people struggle to get online for a number of reasons, we all as a society need to be encouraging and supporting older people to access online opportunities. John, who attends the class said: "People often say older people are digitally disadvantaged or

For immediate release

disabled. This activity proves that wrong. 15 people who can use a computer/ iPad [join each week]. Long may digitals exist!”

Joining a Zoom class is not just about the physical benefits. It is also an opportunity to see the other familiar class participants’ faces, which is the next best thing to a physical class, under the circumstances. “It’s lovely, great! You get to peek into their [class participant’s] houses. It’s heart-warming to see everyone’s faces.”

And their exercise tutor, Caroline, said: “It’s fun to teach a class by Zoom. It’s lovely to see everybody each week, and to chat at the end. It’s also nice to find out about each other more, we are seeing each other in our homes. For example one lady had painted pots and had them fired, and she proudly showed them to the group.”

If you are interested in joining a Zoom exercise class, please get in touch with Generation Games on ggbookings@ageukoxfordshire.org.uk or call 01235 849 403. You can visit the website via www.generationgames.org.uk

Ends

Editor’s notes

About Age UK Oxfordshire

Age UK Oxfordshire is an independent local charity dedicated to giving older people in Oxfordshire comfort, support and opportunities and enabling them to love later life.

We provide free local information, advice and support; commercial products and services; and research and campaign on the issues that matter to people in later life. We work with our national partner, Age UK, and our local Age UK partners in England. Our work focuses on five key areas: money matters, health and wellbeing, home and care, work and training and leisure and lifestyle.

You can find further information on all our services and volunteering opportunities by telephoning 0345 450 1276 or by visiting our website: www.ageuk.org.uk/oxfordshire

Age UK Oxfordshire is a charitable company limited by guarantee (registered charity number 1091529 and company number 4328143). For all media enquiries please contact Sophie Dyer on 01235 849409 or 07827 235405 or email media@ageukoxfordshire.org.uk.